Chapter 11

Prosocial Behavior: Why Do People Help?
• Prosocial behavior is any act performed with the goal of benefiting another person.
Basic Motives Underlying Prosocial Behavior

- A basic question that people have asked is whether people are willing to help when there is nothing to gain, or if they only help when there is some benefit for them.
Darwin recognized that altruistic behavior posed a problem for his theory: if an organism acts altruistically, it may decrease its own reproductive fitness.

The idea of kin selection is the idea that behaviors that help a genetic relative are favored by natural selection.
• Evolutionary Psychology: Instincts and Genes

The norm of reciprocity is the expectation that helping others will increase the likelihood that they will help us in the future.

Simon (1990) suggests that those who are the best learners of societal norms have a competitive advantage, and that one important societal norm is altruism.
Social Exchange: The Costs and Rewards of Helping

Social exchange theory argues that much of what we do stems from the desire to maximize our outcomes and minimize our costs. Like evolutionary psychology, it is a theory based on self-interest; unlike it, it does not assume that self-interest has a genetic basis.

Helping can be rewarding in three ways: it can increase the probability that someone will help us in return; it can relieve the personal distress of the bystander; and it can gain us social approval and increased self-worth.
Helping can also be costly; thus it decreases when costs are high.

Batson (1991) is the strongest proponent of the idea that people often help purely out of the goodness of their hearts.

He argues that pure altruism is most likely to come into play when we experience empathy for the person in need; that is, we are able to experience events and emotions the way that person experiences them.
- Empathy and Altruism: The Pure Motive for Helping

The empathy-altruism hypothesis states that when we feel empathy for a person, we will attempt to help purely for altruistic reasons, that is, regardless of what we have to gain.
Batson's (1991) Empathy-Altruism Theory

1. Observe someone in need of help.
2. Do you feel empathy for this person?
   - No
   - Yes

3. You will help only if it is in your self-interest to do so (that is, if rewards outweigh costs).
4. You will help regardless of whether it is in your self-interest to do so (that is, even if costs outweigh rewards).

Additional Text:
- What a nice person.
- Here's a buck.
- Please come stay at my house tonight. Then we'll find you a place to live.
Percentage agreeing to help Carol

See Carol in class
- No
- Yes

Low empathy | High empathy
---|---
[Bar chart showing percentage]
II. Personal Determinants of Prosocial Behavior: Why Do Some People Help More Than Others?
Individual Differences: The Altruistic Personality

Aspects of a person’s makeup that lead the person to help others in a wide variety of situations defines the altruistic personality.

Research has found that the extent to which people are helpful in one situation is not highly related to how prosocial they are in another situation. Clearly, personality is not the only determinant of whether people will help, at least across many situations.
It appears that different kinds of people are likely to help in different types of situations.

**GENDER**: Eagly and Crowly (1986) found that men are more likely to help in chivalrous, heroic ways, and women are more likely to help in nurturant ways involving long-term commitment.

**IN-GROUP**: People across cultures are more likely to help members of their in-group than members of the out-group.

**CULTURE**: People from collectivist cultures are more prone to help in-group members and less likely to help out-group members than are people from individualist cultures.
The Effects of Mood on Prosocial Behavior

People who are in a good mood are more likely to help.

WHY?
1. good moods make us interpret events in a sympathetic way;
2. helping another prolongs the good mood;
3. good moods increase self-attention, and this in turn leads us to be more likely to behave according to our values and beliefs.

Negative-state relief hypothesis says that people help in order to alleviate their own sadness and distress; it exemplifies a social exchange approach.
III. Situational Determinants of Prosocial Behavior: When Will People Help?
People in rural areas are more helpful. This effect holds over a wide variety of helping situations and in many countries.

One explanation is that they are taught to be more neighborly.

An alternative hypothesis, by Milgram (1970), is the urban overload hypothesis, the idea that people living in cities are likely to keep to themselves in order to avoid being overloaded by all the stimulation they receive.
The Number of Bystanders: The Bystander Effect

The bystander effect is the finding that the greater the number of bystanders who witness an emergency, the less likely any one of them is to help.
Latané and Darley (1970) developed a step-by-step description of how people decide whether to help in an emergency:

1. Noticing an Event
2. Interpreting the Event as an Emergency
3. Assuming Responsibility
4. Knowing How to Help
5. Deciding to Implement the Help
Notice the event
Interpret the event as an emergency
Assume responsibility
Know appropriate form of assistance
Implement decision
Danger to self, legal concerns, embarrassment (costs of helping too high)
Lack of knowledge, lack of competence (can’t offer appropriate help)
Diffusion of responsibility (fail to assume responsibility)
Pluralistic ignorance (interpret the event as non-emergency)
Distraction, in a hurry (fail to notice)

No intervention/no help is given
Intervene and offer assistance
The Number of Bystanders: The Bystander Effect

Pluralistic ignorance is the phenomenon whereby bystanders assume that nothing is wrong in an emergency because no one else looks concerned. This greatly interferes with the interpretation of the event as an emergency and therefore reduces helping.

Diffusion of responsibility is the phenomenon whereby each bystander’s sense of responsibility to help decreases as the number of witnesses increases. This results in a reduction of helping.
Situational Determinants of Prosocial Behavior

• The Nature of the Relationship: Communal Versus Exchange Relationships

Communal relationships are those in which people’s primary concern is with the welfare of the other, whereas exchange relationships are governed by equity concerns.

Generally we are more helpful towards friends than strangers; the exception occurs when the other is beating us in a domain that is personally important and thus threatens our self-esteem.
IV. How Can Helping Be Increased?
People do not always want to be helped. If being helped means that they appear incompetent, they will often suffer in silence, even at the cost of failing at the task. The goal of helping is to make it supportive, highlighting concern for the recipient; watch out when administering aid that may threaten the other person’s self-esteem.
Simply being aware of the barriers to helping can increase people’s chances of overcoming them. For example, people who heard a lecture on bystander intervention were more likely to help someone compared to people who did not hear the lecture.